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ABSTRACT

An example of a unit of study in social studies for the middle school using learning center experiences to enhance and enrich the learning process is provided. In the learning center approach to individualizing instruction, the teacher facilitates and guides, but the students are ultimately responsible for their own progress. This unit, intended for the "C" or middle range student, utilizes the contract method. The unit is based on Unit 5: "Man in His Environment" from the textbook "Sources of Identity" by Paul F. Brandewein, et al. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.). Through a variety of individual activities, including viewing films, filling in maps, participating in group discussions, completing worksheets, and reading and discussing textbook selections, students learn about people who live in the deserts of the Middle East and Africa. The unit of study contains educational objectives, a pre-test, learning experiences, a posttest, additional learning experiences, and quest activities (enrichment activities including a world leaders center, a current events center, a maps and charts center, and a reading center). Appendices contain a module planning sheet and various student handouts for use in the unit. (RM)

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A LEARNING-CENTERED APPROACH TO MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES DEVELOPED AROUND A SEMI-CONTRACTUAL, MODULAR FORMAT

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The learning center approach to individualizing instruction is one which, for some time now, has been used in varying degrees as a means of opening up the classroom. By "opening up" the classroom is not here necessarily meant to take down walls or have large open spaces, but to divide the traditional classroom into learning areas in order that both students and teacher have more options from which to learn and teach. In a classroom that uses a learning center approach, the teacher becomes a guider and facilitator of learning rather than an administrator of knowledge where the focus of attention is on the front of the room. Johnston, etal. (1978) write, "Traditionally, a teacher was portrayed as standing in front of a classroom lecturing, giving direcions, justifying authority, telling, criticizing, clarifying, monitoring, evaluating, and requiring of the students essentially reproductive behavior." However, by the effective use of learning centers, the focus, or responsibility for learning must rest with the learner. Although the teacher can facilitate and guide, the learners are ultimately responsible for their own progress. All educational efforts are concerned with both the 'product' and 'process' of learning...." Consequently, in a learning centered classroom, pupil and teacher become as partners in the learning process.

A study of the literature quickly reveals the following rationale for using learning centers in the classroom. Klingele (1979) says, "Learning centers are heavily relied upon to provide flexibility in the classroom. Learning centers...are concentrations of student activities focused in a particular area

of a classroom or school." Thomas (1975) describes learning centers as:

> ...any one area within the classroom itself established temporarily or permanently for the purpose of providing pupils with differentiated learning experiences in the form of individual or group activities to which pupils may be directed by the teacher or may be given the opportunity to select, manage, and evaluate the experiences of which the center is composed. The learning center may constitute an individual desk, a bulletin board or chalkboard, a table, a file cabinet, or a bookshelf. It may be teacher-constructed, pupil-constructed, or the result of a teacher-pupil effort.

Johnston, etal. (1978), describe a learning center as a "...designated area of a classroom that contains a variety of instructional materials and activities organized around a topic, theme, concept, or skill.... A learning center should provide activities that accommodate different interests and learning styles." In addition, John Dewey (1977) observes, "...if an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens iniative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense...," an individual will probably be driven to further learning in the future.

Therefore, using the learning center approach as described above, this paper will develop a unit for use in middle school social studies from a semi-contractual format.

The literature reveals that there are many styles and patterns of learning centers and, according to Thomas (1975), there are four categories into which these styles and patterns fit. They are: Motivational, Diagnostic, Prescriptive, and Enrichment.

A motivational center is a useful area of the classroom because it "...appeals to a pupils innate curiosity, it develops the pupils desire for peer approval, and it provides a rewarding environment." (Thomas, 1975)

The diagnostic center is used as a means of finding out what the pupils are all about. It is basically behavior oriented as the teacher observes the pupils' activities while they are experiencing a particular learning center.

The activities of the prescription center are determined by the findings of the diagnostic center. The experiences pupils undergo in the prescription type center will be the kinds of experiences that are at his ability level and rate of learning.

Enrichment centers ar numerous. Bascially, they are any kind of center that adds variety to and expansion of a facet of the classroom curriculum. Whereas, the motivational, the diagnostic, and the prescriptive focus at individualizing learning for the student at his level of ability, the enrichment center does this while at the same time attempting to broaden the student's knowledge of his world. An example of such a center in the social studies would be one that deals with current events. At this learning center would be found newspapers, magazines, pictures, filmstirps, recordings, books, etc. that deal with current events at all ability and interest levels.

The specific type of learning centers foreseen in this paper will be of the enrichment type, be based on inquiry and comparison, and be an integral part of a unit of instruction using the tree-sense approach (Klingele, 1979) It might be added

that this writer used such a design in his classroom, but without the added dimension of learning center experiences.

As mentioned before, the format is contractual in nature. The contract is based on 80% mastery of information and aimed at the "C" or middle range student. This does not, however, infer that the instruction cannot be aimed higher, or, perhaps, lower. In addition, no grade lower than "C" is earned. Concerning contracts, Aierstock (1978) writes, "...contracted responsibilities are not built one upon the other so that the more work that is accomplished, the higher the grade; rather, the quality of work is considered to be the criteria for academic achievement." This writer agrees and the learning unit as developed in this paper attempts to do what Aierstock describes. (See Appendix 1 for an example of the planning sheet.)

The design for instruction is as follows:

I. Unit: A topic covering a large segment of material comprising several concept areas.

II. Module: A logical grouping of concepts included in the larger unit topic. The module may be equated with a lesson plan but usually requires more than a single period for mastery learning.

III. Objectives: Objectives are in reality, statements of expected learning outcomes. These expected outcomes should include basic competencies needed for minimal mastery of the concept area.

IV. Learning Experiences: Learning experiences should be correlated with objectives. For each objective, state the learning experiences the student needs for mastery of that objective. Each learning experience should be stated so that students achieve the intent of the objective without further directions from the teacher. Materials to be used must be explicitly described.

V. Evaluation: Evaluation is needed for the student to know that she/he has achieved the objectives. The format of the evaluation may include oral questions, charts to be completed, problems to be solved, short discussion and objective test items. Whatever the evaluation format, an evaluation sequence must be correlated with each objective if mastery learning is to be attained for each student.

VI. Additional Learning Experiences: The additional learning experiences are remedial and should be constructed for the learning style of students who experience difficulty in learning. Additional learning experience must be available for each objective. The student repeats activities only for the objective(s) not previously achieved to complete the basic competencies required for minimal mastery of the basic concept area.

VII. Quest Activities: Activities ranging from highly interesting supplementary materials to independent research projects must be available for those students who demonstrate early mastery of the required objectives of the module. The nature and time for completion of these Quest Activities should be contracted between the student and the teacher.

The teacher develops a unit and then divides the unit into modules. Each module is designed so that no student earns less than a "C" grade, since according to the design, 80% is mastery. Each module begins with a pre-test and ends with a post-test. Any student who obtains an 80% score on the pre-test goes directly to the post-test. Any student who obtains less than 80% on the pre-test completes the entire module and then takes the post-test. Any students who obtains less than 80% on the post-test completes "Additional Learning Experiences" and takes a different, but similar, post-test--this post-test could possibly be a version of the original pre-test. The student who satisfactorily completes the module moves into the Quest Activities, and contracts for a higher grade, if she/he desires. Whereas some of the Module activities might involve the learning

centers, all Quest Activities are conducted from the learning centers.

The module described herein is based on the seventh grade social studies textbook Sources of Identity by Paul F. Brandewein, etal , and published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Unit 5: Man in His Environment

Module 1: People of the Desert

After completing this module students will be able to:

1. Compare cultural traditions of people who live in desert areas with those of the students.
2. Locate and name the nations of the Middle East and North Africa as listed by the teacher.
3. Discuss the available resources of people in the desert.

A. Pre-test: The pre-test is a direct result of the objectives listed above and the learning experiences.

B. Learning Experiences

1. Show films "The Middle East: Crossroads of Three Continents" (16mm, color or bw, 13 1/2 min.); "The Middle East" (16mm, color or bw, 13 min.).
   a. teacher led discussion of films.
   b. divide into groups--answer and discuss questions concerning films--answers are to be written and handed in.

2. Class is divided into groups--Each group is given blank maps of North Africa and the Middle East.
   a. fill in names of nations from list on chalkboard.
   b. locate and name major deserts (those that the teacher feels are important are listed on the chalkboard).
   c. locate and name major water ways (those that the teacher feels are important are listed on the chalkboard).
   d. color code nations, deserts, waterways.

3. Class is divided into groups.
   a. each group chooses a recording secretary and a chairperson-spokesperson.
   b. discuss questions on p. 6 of the texbook that deal with the pictures on p. 7.

c. each group shares its answers with the class through its spokesperson.

4. Read pages 6-13 in the textbook.
   a. individually, or with a partner, answer the questions on p. 14.

5. Using the worksheet "Cultural Traditions" (Appendix 2) compare the cultural traditions of people in the desert with your cultural traditions.

6. Using the worksheet "Foreign Adventure" (Appendix 3) imagine that you leave your home and inhabit a North African or Middle Eastern country.

7. From your reading and from the films, list 10 resources of people of the desert.

C. Post-test: The post-test is a direct result of the objectives listed above and the learning experiences.

D. Additional Learning Experiences: For those students who don't achieve mastery, additional activities, other readings, etc., are prescribed. Emphasis in prescription is centered on areas of weakness. Another post-test is administered.

1. Listen to teacher-made tape describing desert areas and the people who live there.
   a. tell the teacher about what you heard.

2. Read pages 327-333 in Our World and Its People.
   a. tell a classmate about what you read
      and then
   b. tell the teacher about what you read.

3. View filmstrip "What is the Middle East?"

4. Discuss the cultural traditions of the people of the desert with a classmate. Compare them with your traditions. Have the same discussion with your teacher.

E. Quest Activites: These activities are of an enrichment nature engaged in at the various social studies learning centers. Each Quest Activity may be contracted for a higher grade with the teacher. Directions are on 5x8 cards.)

1. World Leaders Center

   a. Card 1: Read about three of the following leaders--

1. Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran
2. Anwar Sadat of Egypt
3. Menachem Begin of Israel
4. King Saud of Saudi Arabia
5. King Hussein of Jordan
6. President Kaddafi of Libya
7. Go to Card 2.

b. Card 2: Choose two of the three leaders you read about on Card 1 and do one of the following--
   1. Write a paper comparing the views of each leader and report to the class or
   2. Tape your report and share it with three of your friends or
   3. With the help of your teacher, videotape your report like a news broadcast, and share it with the class.

2. Current Events Center

a. Card 1: Do Global News worksheet. (Appendix 4) or
b. Card 2: Do worksheet Top Political Story in the News. (Appendix 5) or
c. Card 3: Report about the problems Israel is having with Egypt and other Middle East nations. Do the following--
   1. Make a list of at least five questions that deal with the problems. Show the list to your teacher.
   2. Using your questions, interview a teacher from another class, a classmate, your parents, an adult friend that is not a relative.
   3. Compare their answers with your opinions on the same questions.
   4. Discuss your findings with your teachers.
   5. Draw some conclusions and share your findings with the class in one of the following ways--
      a. oral news report or
      b. video tape news report or
d. Card 4: Using the same pattern as Card 3, report about the problems Iran is having with Iraq.

3. Maps and Charts Center

a. Card 1: Construct a chart containing the following information for any four countries in the Middle East and North Africa. (Appendix 6)
   1. Area
   2. Population

3. Chief Exports
4. Chief Imports or

b. Card 2: Choose one country in the Middle East or North Africa and do the following--
   1. Draw a map of that country.
   2. On the map show the location of the Capitol city, other major population areas, agriculture areas, major industrial areas and industries, rivers and lakes, desert regions.

4. Reading Center

a. Card 1: Read a book about Bedouins, about Aborigines, and about Pueblos. Compare the life styles of each group and present a report to the class. or
b. Card 2: Read about the Islamic religion and report to the class.

This has been an example of a unit of study in social studies for the middle school using learning center experiences to enhance and enrich the learning process. It is possible (quite probable) that students involved in Quest Activities may not have completed their investigations by the end of Module I. However, these same Quest Activities could also be continued into Module II, or III, or IV, or whatever, if the student so wished. It is as important, in this writer's estimation, that students continue a topic of interest as it is to experience closure of an assignment or process. The end result may be more beneficial to both the student and to the class as a whole. John Dewey (1977) writes,

> ...experiences in order to be educative must lead out into an expanding world of subject-matter of facts or information and of ideas. This condition is satisfied only as the educator views teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experience. This educator has a long look ahead, and views every present experience as a moving force in influencing what future experiences will be....

In similar vein, David Elkind (1977) says, "Educational programs, of whatever kind, must meet two basic yet contradictory human needs. One is the need for individuality, the striving of each person to be unique and to realize his or her full powers and potentials. The other is for human sociality: to relate to other people and to subordinate one's personal inclinations for the benefit of others." The purposes behind a learning unit such as the one described in this paper are to hopefully create atmospheres and experiences in classrooms and schools as described by Dewey and Elkind.

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APPENDIX 1

Module Planning Sheet

Purpose (Goal): _____

Specific Outcomes	Basic Learning Experiences	Assessment	Additional Learning Experiences	Quest Activities

APPENDIX 2

Cultural Traditions

Families must work together (cooperate with each other) to make a home and get all the chores done. Compare your family traditions and work habits with people who live in the desert regions of North Africa and the Middle East. Are they vastly different from yours? Use this chart to make your comparisons. You may draw pictures if you wish.

Categories	Desert Areas	Mine
Cooking		
Food Eaten		
Types of Transportation		
How People Get Clothes		
Lighting		
Medicines		

What are some of the chores young people your age might do in desert regions?

What are some chores young people in the United States might do that may not be done in desert regions?

Where do you think young people your age have to work harder? Why?

APPENDIX 3

Foreign Adventure

If you were to leave your home and move to a North Africa or Middle Eastern country:

1. What three ideas would you take with you?

   a.

   b.

   c.

2. What ten items would you consider as essential for your survival during the first year in the foreign country?

3. Get together with three classmates. Compare your lists and make a single list.

4. Who would you select to accompany you in this venture?

5. What rules of behavior would you insist upon during travel and the first year in this foreign country?

APPENDIX 4

Global News with the _____
(local paper)

1. Rank order the parts of the world according to the amount of coverage you believe each has received in the local papers in the last month

Regional Divisions:	My Rank Order:
West Europe	1.
East Europe	2.
Asia	3.
North Africa	4
South America	5.
Central America	6.
Canada	7.
Middle East	8.

2. What part(s) of the world seem to be having the most consequences for your future?

3. What part(s) of the world do you believe will have the most consequences for you in the year 2000?

4. Identify the type of events you feel most likely will have the most consequences for you and then discuss these with two of your friends and your teacher.

5. What global problems do you see as a result of the previous questions? Consult your teacher for assistance.

APPENDIX 5

Top Political Stories in the News

In your opinion, what has been the top political story dealing with North Africa or the Middle East during the past month?

Top Story:

Why Chosen:

Why do you think this happened?

How important is this story to the people in Ann Arbor and/or Michigan?

How important is it to the lives of people in other parts of the world? Where, specifically?

How important is it to our own lives?

Will it continue to be an important story in the Future? Why? Why not?

What do you think might happen next?

APPENDIX 6

Information Chart

Country	Area	Population	Chief Exports	Chief Imports